

90-93FM **BBC** RADIO 3

The Radio 3 Lunchtime Concert
Live from Wigmore Hall

Sylvia McNair Ted Taylor
George & Ira Gershwin



WIGMORE
HALL

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WIGMORE HALL

George & Ira Gershwin

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1 Someone To Watch Over Me | 5.03 |
| 2 A Foggy Day / Embraceable You | 3.36 |
| 3 Isn't It A Pity | 4.12 |
| 4 Stiff Upper Lip / Let's Call The Whole Thing Off | 4.11 |
| 5 Summertime | 3.55 |
| 6 For You, For Me, For Evermore | 4.25 |
| 7 I Got Rhythm | 3.10 |
| 8 Prelude no.1 (piano solo) | 2.37 |

Kurt Weill & Ira Gershwin

- | | |
|-----------|------|
| 9 My Ship | 5.13 |
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George & Ira Gershwin

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| 10 The Man I Love | 5.29 |
| 11 Nice Work If You Can Get It | 2.40 |
| 12 Shall We Dance? | 3.01 |
| 13 By Strauss | 2.38 |
| 14 He Loves And She Loves | 2.48 |
| 15 They Can't Take That Away From Me | 3.50 |
| 16 Love Is Here To Stay | 2.42 |
| 17 Just Another Rhumba | 3.32 |

Rodgers & Hammerstein

- | | |
|-----------------------|------|
| 18 Hello Young Lovers | 2.34 |
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total time 65.37

Sylvia McNair (soprano)

Ted Taylor (piano)

Recorded at Wigmore Hall, 14 June 1999





George & Ira Gershwin

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Recorded: Wigmore Hall, 14 June 1999

Recording Producer: Adam Gatehouse

Recording Engineers: Neil Pemberton, Rebecca Jaworska

Post-Production: John Hunt

Publisher: Chappell, except 'Hello Young Lovers' (Williamson)

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

I have more tunes in my head than I could put down on paper in a hundred years.' Thus did George Gershwin define his mastery of popular song. His concert works have survived condemnation by critics, but the key to his art lies in his Broadway shows, the opera *Porgy and Bess*, and songs for Hollywood musicals written towards the end of a frenetic career cruelly cut short when he died from an undiagnosed brain tumour, aged 38.

Gershwin said he liked to write six tunes a day, to get the bad ones out of his system. When asked how he and his lyricist brother Ira crafted their work, George replied: "Usually the music comes first. I hit on a new tune, play it for Ira, and he hums it all over the place until he gets an idea for the lyric. Then we work the thing out together." For his brother it was not so simple. A tune that flowed effortlessly from George's fingers could mean days of labour for Ira, known as 'The Jeweller' for polishing every line.

Their first complete show together was the 1924 revue *Lady, Be Good!* Adele Astaire co-starred with her brother Fred, and Gershwin wrote *The Man I Love* for her. But in the try-outs the song was dropped. Gershwin re-used it in *Strike Up The Band* in 1927, but this first version never reached Broadway. Ira rewrote the song for Rosalie in 1928, but it vanished again. Finally Gershwin's publisher issued it independently. It was ahead of its time, a fine example of how Gershwin compressed substantial emotions and musical procedures into a 32-bar frame.

Someone To Watch Over Me is from the 1926 revue *Oh, Kay!*, starring Gertrude Lawrence. The plot lampooned Prohibition, a popular target on Broadway. Gershwin had developed an early 'crush' on the pentatonic scale - made up of the black keys on the piano - and the first nine notes of this haunting tune can all be played on these keys.

Conducting the premiere of *Girl Crazy* in 1930, Gershwin faced an incredible line-up in the pit: Benny Goodman (at that time playing saxophone), trombonists Glenn Miller and Jack Teagarden, Jimmy Dorsey on alto sax, Gene Krupa on drums, and cornetist Red Nichols. Thanks to these jazz luminaries, and its Wild West setting, *Girl Crazy* was hailed as 'merry and very loud'. In one of its quieter moments, the 19-year-old Ginger Rogers sang the seductive *Embraceable You*.

The Gershwins had their flops. In 1933 *Pardon My English* proved, in Ira's words, 'a headache from start to finish'. The previews went so badly that its star, Jack Buchanan, bought himself out. It suffered their shortest run: 46 performances. Thankfully, *Isn't It A Pity* survived the debacle. Its intimate conversational tone shows how Gershwin can speak to us today with a directness that is undimmed.

On its first hearing in *Porgy and Bess*, the exquisite lullaby *Summertime* is sung by Clara to her baby. It recurs at key points in the opera, pointing up the need for tenderness and protection among the black community of Catfish Row, constantly under threat from outside forces. Gershwin never lived to see *Porgy*

and *Bess* triumph in the world's opera houses after its modest run in 1935.

In 1936 the Gershwins moved to Hollywood and wrote the RKO musical *Shall We Dance* for Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. Let's Call The Whole Thing Off features a loving couple unable to agree on 'Ether, eyether, neether, nyther.' Gershwin captures their dogged insistence by setting each word to the interval of a falling fifth. From this film we also hear *They Can't Take That Away From Me*, with its casual lyricism, and the up-tempo title-song.

RKO's second commission was *A Damsel in Distress*, set in England and based on a story by P.G. Wodehouse, who was Ira's friend and literary hero. Fred Astaire sang *Stiff Upper Lip* and two superb songs, *Nice Work If You Can Get It* and *A Foggy Day* (In London Town), whose rising, probing intervals and major/minor ambivalence really do give the impression of peering through a fog.

Gershwin was suffering serious headaches when he began writing songs for Samuel Goldwyn's *Goldwyn Follies* in the spring of 1937. He was disillusioned with the movie business, particularly the way the composer lost control of his work. His music was mutilated on the soundtrack, and *Just Another Rhumba* was cut altogether. From this sorry episode came two songs of the highest quality: *Love Walked In*, and the one included here, *Love Is Here To Stay*. It was Gershwin's last song. He died on 11th July, never regaining consciousness after a five-hour operation.

By Strauss is a cheeky parody of a Viennese waltz. It went into a composite score by various

writers called *The Show Is On* (1936). Ira wrote lyrics for two decades after George's death, collaborating with Kurt Weill on *Lady in the Dark* (1941) in which Gertrude Lawrence sang the beautifully tender *My Ship*. George's one venture into operetta, *Song of the Flame* (1925) had not proved a success. But he enjoyed this collaboration with Oscar Hammerstein, whose *Hello Young Lovers* (written with Richard Rodgers for *The King And I*) reminds us of another legendary partnership.

Gershwin published *Three Preludes* for piano in 1927. The driving rhythm of *Prelude No.1* seems to mix Charleston and Rhumba. It needs strong hands and agile fingers, and brings us face-to-face with Gershwin's own electrifying virtuosity.

Sylvia McNair

Sylvia McNair, born in Ohio, graduated from Indiana University. She has appeared with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and the Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Boston Symphony Orchestras, working with conductors such as Slatkin, Ozawa and Masur. In Europe, she has performed with the LSO, London Philharmonic, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Vienna Philharmonic and Berlin Philharmonic, with conductors including Tilson Thomas, Harnoncourt, Haitink and Abbado.

In 1989, Sylvia McNair made her operatic debut at Glyndebourne as Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*), and at Covent Garden as Ilia (*Idomeneo*), in which role she also made her Salzburg and Paris debuts. 1992 saw her debuts at San Francisco Opera as Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and at the Metropolitan Opera as Marzelline. She has returned to all these houses, working with, among others, Chung, Cambreling and Dohnányi.

Since winning the first Marion Anderson Award in 1990, Sylvia McNair has appeared in recitals at major venues throughout Europe and the USA. Her extensive recording career has embraced opera, oratorio and recitals, and has seen collaborations with artists such as John Eliot Gardiner, Sir Neville Marriner, Sir Colin Davis, André Previn and Roger Vignoles. Her CD of Purcell songs with Christopher Hogwood won a Grammy Award. Her many other recordings appear on Deutsche Grammophon and Philips, among others.

Highlights of the 1998/99 season include appearances with the Cleveland Orchestra with Eschenbach, Philadelphia Orchestra with Welsch-Möst, Vienna Philharmonic with Norrington and a return to the Metropolitan Opera as Cleopatra.

Ted Taylor

Ted Taylor graduated in conducting from Indiana University and became assistant conductor at the Opera Theater there. He has since established an excellent reputation as both an operatic conductor and a first-rate accompanist. In eight seasons as Music Director of Mobile Opera he led numerous productions including *Aida*, *Turandot*, *Manon*, *Tosca* and *La traviata*, and ballets such as *The Nutcracker*. His operatic work has taken place largely in the USA, at opera houses including Atlanta, Indianapolis, Augusta, Syracuse, Chicago, Mississippi and the Metropolitan Opera, New York. He has also worked in Canada, the USSR, Japan and Italy, and has conducted the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. In 1995 Ted Taylor joined the conducting staff of the Metropolitan Opera, having spent the previous season working with the Lyric Opera in Chicago. As an accompanist, Ted Taylor has collaborated with many eminent singers, including Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Eileen Farrell, with whom he was the regular accompanist on Miss Farrell's cable television show. His discography includes an album of music by Alma Mahler and Lili Boulanger which

he recorded with Katherine and Kristine Ciesinski. Ted Taylor now lives in Manhattan, where he is a vocal coach and teacher.

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Sylvia McNair Ted Taylor
George & Ira Gershwin